

TESTIMONY OF ASA HUTCHINSON
BEFORE THE
HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INTEGRATION, AND OVERSIGHT

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, it is my privilege to appear once again before the Congress but in a new capacity. I have appeared before this Committee a number of times as Undersecretary at the Department of Homeland Security and I appreciate the courtesies you have always extended and for your leadership on the challenges we face as a nation and as a government.

As you know I am now in the private sector and as a citizen I have more freedom to comment on our security challenges. After investing over two years of my public career in helping shape the new Department, I am pleased to continue my involvement in homeland security as head of the Homeland Security Group at Venable LLP. This firm had the wisdom and foresight to build an inter disciplinary group of professionals to help educate and guide the business community through the new world of homeland security and I am delighted to have joined such a team.

Today, I will comment on the organizational structure of DHS and the focus of this hearing is very timely in view of the 90 day review of Secretary Chertoff on organizational changes that may be needed in order to more effectively address the risks we face. I compliment Secretary Chertoff on this approach. It reflects the need for review but does not make changes simply in reaction to perceived shortcomings within the department.

First, with the 22 agencies making up the new Department, Congress wisely gave broad latitude to the Administration in reorganizing the functions and mission of the old entities. A new mission was mandated and old structures were ill equipped to accomplish the objectives of integration, information sharing and security. The changes have been tough, as change always is, but the 180,000 men and women of homeland security should receive the thanks of the American people for their determination to successfully set up the new Department. As a result of the statutory flexibility given to the Secretary of Homeland Security in reorganizing the 22 agencies there are notable differences between the Homeland Security Act and the current structure of the department. For example, the Bureau of Border Security is established in Section 442 of the Act but those functions are organized as the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency. At some point Congress may wish to conform the authorizing legislation to the reality of the department.

Second, I would offer the following areas that should be considered in the reorganization review of the department:

1. Strengthening the policy office of the Secretary. The policy director at the departmental level should be elevated to an Assistant Secretary position or Undersecretary level to enhance the ability of the Secretary to forge policy changes and to drive those changes within the executive branch.
2. Expedite the formation of the Screening Coordination Office that is set forth in the President's 2006 budget submission to Congress. It is important to prevent further stove-piping of the programs brought together in the Screening Coordination Office. This can only be done by implementing some coordination oversight role at the department level now in anticipation of the approval of such office in the 2006 appropriation process.
3. Enhance the role of the Chief Information Officer by raising the office to be a direct report to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary. The integration of the information technology systems is critical and must have the immediate support of the highest levels of the department. Direct access of the CIO to the Secretary is essential in driving this important mission.
4. Move forward with the creation of regional leadership for the Department with a pilot region being created this year. The regional team would enhance relationships with local governments; be prepared to manage and coordinate responses to any terrorist incident; and to more effectively monitor homeland security grant spending; and finally to oversee regional planning and homeland security exercises.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to respond to any questions.